

Is Your Child Ready for Kindergarten?

Is your child ready for kindergarten? Starting elementary school for the first time can be intimidating for youngsters, but less so for those who've been prepared for the experience.

Teachers usually look for solid oral language skills and a student's ability to listen. Can your child talk and respond to others, listen, ask and answer questions? Talk to your child about everything – build their vocabulary by describing who, what, when, where, why and how. Turn off the TV and tell stories, sing songs and read books to them every day.

Teachers also look to see if your child can be independent and if they play well with others. Can your child follow simple one-step directions, rules and routines? Are they taking care of their belongings and materials at home, like helping at clean-up time to put toys and other items away? Encourage your children to start accepting small amounts of responsibility and assist them with their social development by taking them to play groups and play grounds and attending storytime at the library or your local bookstore so they can learn how to interact with others.

Of course, teachers expect new students to have strong fine-motor skills and basic letter and number recognition. Kids learn through play. When kids color with crayons, use play dough, make crafts and play with blocks, they're improving their finger coordination which will be helpful when it's time to learn how to write. Point out letters to them when you're out and about, keep magnetic letters on your fridge, and show them how to spell their name. As a parent, you are your child's first teacher.

Thanks to Sarah Sterzing, Early Childhood Programs Coordinator with the City of Norfolk, for contributing to this piece.

What do parents usually need to register children for school?

possible so the school and teacher can be prepared to welcome your child on the first day. On-time registration for kindergarten helps the school system plan for attendance, but more importantly it helps your child enter school ready to succeed. Every year, many students arrive unprepared and begin late in learning due to late registration and late attendance.

To register your child for school, they need to have a physical examination, up-to-date immunizations and a complete shot record. You'll also need their birth certificate and social security number. The school office will want to know the name and address of the last school they attended and have a copy of the most recent grades from that school. Finally, you'll need a valid DMV ID and proof of residency like a utilities bill, rental or home purchase agreement. Those are the usual requirements, but each district is different so I recommend calling the school ahead of time to make sure you bring everything you need.

3. What are some other things parents can do to get their kids ready for school?

Now is the time to get back into a regular routine with your kids, especially for kindergarteners who may not be used to going to school. Start getting to bed earlier and set those clocks to practice getting up in the morning. Take advantage of Open House events that the schools offer. Little kids and big kids can benefit from seeing their new classroom and where their desk sits. Also, meeting the teacher and some of their classmates before the first day can be very helpful.

4. To learn more about early childhood education in Norfolk, call Sarah Sterzing at 664-6071. And for more parenting information, contact Healthy Families Partnership at 727-1300 or check out their website at Hampton.gov/healthyfamilies.